

The Mystery of Lucien Delorme

Remains of the "Man Who Could See Through Walls"

By Guy de Teramond

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CHAPTER I.
The Man Who Could See.

LUCIEN DELORME, young, shy, shrinking behind large smoked glasses, arrived in Paris from his home at Eu to put himself under a nerve specialist's care. Seeking absolute quiet, he secured an upper room in the select boarding house of Mme. Arnheim, in the Rue Mozart.

The room was next to that of Mrs. Tankery, a rich American. A Gustavian General and an old professor were the only other boarders just then. A few mornings after Delorme's arrival Mme. Tankery was found murdered.

She lay on the floor in the middle of her room. All her jewels (she had kept them under her pillow, refusing to deposit them in the office safe) were gone. The costly lace had been cut from her dress.

M. Clamart, the head of the Detective Bureau, arrived, accompanied by a legal physician and followed by employees of M. Bertillon, with their apparatus for taking fingerprints left by the village.

"The crime is solved," he said, after an instant's examination. "It was committed by professionals who are not experimenting. Everything has been planned in advance and admirably executed. The American lady was sound asleep when, during the night, the assassins came from outside by a window that is yet to be discovered, cut out one of the window panes with a diamond, passed an arm through the opening and slid back the window fastening, then they had nothing more to do except to enter the room."

"Without the least pause they rushed to the bed, where the exact position they knew, and by a well-aimed blow of a poniard, one of them severed the unfortunate woman's carotid artery before she had time to utter a single cry, beating down the sheets with their hands."

Had she then mechanically taken a few steps, to fall in the middle of the room? Or had the murderers laid their victim's corpse there in order—not knowing where she was in the habit of hiding her jewels—to be able to search the mattresses more conveniently?

The servants were questioned; then the boarders. Delorme was summoned. Mme. Arnheim reported that he was not at home.

The questioner started up. "Come out! And at what time?" "I don't know. He had already left his room when the waiter went in to carry his breakfast."

"No one has seen him to-day, and consequently he may very easily have gone in the middle of the night?" "Certainly."

"And I suppose he was not in the habit of taking such early departures?" "This is really the first time."

Just then Lucien Delorme returned and was ushered into the presence of the chief of the detectives.

"You wish to see me, sir?" he asked. With a bound the officer was between the young man and the door, to prevent an attempt at flight, and abruptly exclaimed:

"Up with your hands!" Delorme, taken by surprise, mechanically obeyed, then calmly recovering his coolness, he said:

"What does this mean?" "I am the chief of the detective service."

"That is possible, sir, but is it a reason for speaking to me with such rudeness? Set your mind at rest, I am not armed, and if you wish me to answer you I must beg you to adopt a different manner."

"Come, no useless talk. You know what I am talking about?" "No."

"This murder that was committed here last night?" "What murder?"

"Mrs. Tankery's." "Mrs. Tankery has been murdered? Last night?" "Oh, poor woman!"

"You knew nothing about it?" persisted M. Clamart, looking at him with a searching glance.

"No, I went out this morning, doubtless before the discovery of the crime."

"Contrary to your habits, and without taking time to eat your breakfast?" "Yes, Dr. Gueroult, who is attending me, asked me to come to his office this morning before eating."

"So it is a mere coincidence?" the officer went on ironically. "But suppose we should talk a little, now, about Mrs. Tankery? It seems that you predicted she would be murdered?"

"Not at all. I simply said, as well as I remember, that it was imprudent on her part to make such a display of all her jewels."

"Did you know their value?" "I had heard Mme. Arnheim say that they represented a little fortune. I am, however, a very incompetent judge."

"And you were not ignorant that she always kept them in her room?" "Certainly."

"Suddenly she stopped. Pardon me. Questions like these! Surely you could not suspect me of being connected in any way with this horrible crime?"

The detective looked him in the eyes and said slowly:

"Lucien Delorme, you are one of Mrs. Tankery's murderers!" The young man's face expressed utter amazement.

"I, a murderer? The charge is ridiculous. Why, I did not leave my room last night. And, besides, for what reason should I have killed this poor lady?"

"Come, Delorme," answered the detective, in a conciliatory tone. "I did not say that. It was only a hypothesis, based on certain circumstances, one doesn't refuse to keep watch or to throw a rope out of the window, believing that the plan is merely robbery."

"But I have done nothing of the sort; I swear it. I knew nothing of the crime. I was coming home quietly to breakfast when, at the foot of the staircase, I met Mme. Arnheim, who sent me here."

"And yet, yes. . . I do know something. I must first have my conscience by telling you. I could not believe it. . . but since Mrs. Tankery has been murdered, it must be true."

The detective concealed a smile of triumph.

"Sit down, my dear M. Delorme, and tell me about it."

The young man began his story:

"Neither closely nor remotely, I have been connected with this terrible crime. If you have the slightest sus-

High Tide!



pecting all the details and which, through some incomprehensible anticipation, coincided with the truth!"

"Well, my friend," the magistrate said kindly. "Out with you, and show us all don't begin to make fun of the police; another time you might have worse."

Mme. Arnheim listened with a beating heart to this interesting story. She would have liked to question him further, but Delorme did not seem inclined to say more. He had talked too much to the chief of the detective service, and henceforth he intended to keep cautiously on his guard.

He merely informed his hostess that he meant to leave her the next morning.

Deep sadness, a tone of discouragement, suddenly tinged his voice as he went on:

"The doctors can do nothing for me. . . It would be necessary to undergo a serious operation, the risk of which is doubtful. The other in the femur, it is very probable that these are the same men who killed my poor uncle."

"That is probable, certainly," replied Lucien Delorme; "but, what can I do?"

"What can you do? Why, you must see clearly that you hold in your hand the key of the entire mystery. Your words possess decisive weight in the eyes of the police. I will add one thing to find you to be treated to give me all the information that . . ."

"Sir," interrupted the young man coldly, "it is impossible for me to tell you anything more than the newspapers have related of these occurrences, and, if I answered that I know nothing, it is the truth."

"And I," cried the baron violently, "I tell you in my turn that you do know something. . . I don't know what. . . I don't know how. . . But in your secret—keep it. But in order not to promise the discussion, I will add one thing: I formally promised a reward of 100,000 francs to the person whose information would put me on the track of my murderers."

Lucien hurried down to the drawing room.

The baron was waiting patiently. He was a man about fifty years old, small, but with an air of undeniable distinction and elegance, to whom a long beard thickly mingled with silver threads gave a certain venerable importance, emphasized by the little red rosette in his buttonhole.

"Baron Plucke" asked the young man.

The latter rose, and coming forward, replied:

"Yes, I am Baron Plucke."

"You asked for me, sir?" "Yes, a gracious gesture, my visitor invited him to take a chair near him. Then, when both were seated, he began:

"First, I must apologize, sir, for disturbing you in this way and insisting so urgently upon talking with you. But I beg you not to regard my conduct as mere curiosity, as it might appear to you."

Lucien Delorme bowed.

"What is the matter in question?" "This is the affair. While reading, I found now, an account of the terrible drama that occurred in this very house, I was struck by one detail of your story to the chief of the detective service."

"You know that. . . you afterward declared that it was imaginary, that he had dreamed it, and no attention should be paid to the matter. Nevertheless, I attach to it a value which you will understand when I have related the following facts. Four years ago, my uncle, Baron Plucke-Strohe was murdered in his home in the Avenue d'Antin. One morning he was found in his chamber, with the death-rattle in his throat, which was cut by a steel wire, like Mrs. Tankery's. This singularly apparent is nothing very singular, and might be only a sad coincidence."

"But this is nothing. Before explaining my uncle had the strength to utter a few barely intelligible words: bullet. . . head. . ."

The inquest explained a cab and have my trunk brought

down? By the way, I have changed my plans. I shall not leave Paris—and I will ask you to write down my new address so that my letters can be forwarded."

Then, in a careless tone, he added:

"Gigantic Palace. . . Champs-Elysees."

CHAPTER III.
Profitable Business.

BARON PLUCKE had not made his fortune solely on the Stock Exchange—a first-class business man, no branch of speculation was unfamiliar to him, and for thirty years he had been interested in all the great enterprises which had enriched their stockholders.

A bachelor, a multi-millionaire, able to indulge, without hesitation, his most costly fancies, people wondered why he still devoted himself to work.

It was purely from inclination. Baron Plucke could not be idle.

On the very day of his interview with Lucien Delorme, at Madame Arnheim's family boarding-house, his valet, on his return, gave him the card of a visitor who had been waiting several moments:

COMTE D'ABAZOLIA-VISCOA, Ex-Embassy Attache, His Highness the Maharajah of Pandhukurrah.

The baron knew his caller, having met him already several times in society, where a mutual friend had introduced them to each other.

He was a man still young in appearance, distinguished by bearing, with pleasant features, keen eyes, and a slightly bronzed complexion, being a native of Sicily, where his relatives had perished in the terrible earthquake that destroyed Messina.

Baron Plucke shook hands with him, invited him to a seat, and courteously asked the reason for his visit.

"You are not ignorant, sir," replied the Count, "that I am the Paris representative of the Maharajah of Pandhukurrah. It would be too long a story, and moreover useless, to explain why I left the diplomatic career to occupy this position. I will tell you simply that I have succeeded my father, who himself owed it to the deep affection of the Prince, whom I succeeded, to the object of my visit, and I will go to the point."

The Maharajah of Pandhukurrah, of whom Comte d'Abazolia-Viscosa spoke, was a ruler who could be credited with the richest and most powerful of the Indian princes. He owned immense territories, superb palaces, elephants and bayaderes by thousands, and endless wealth.

"The Maharajah," went on the Count, "has been dispossessed. But he has obtained permission to live on in his palace, and the rigid surveillance of the British Government, and to retain his wealth. Now he finds that he needs for an enterprise concerning which I am required to maintain absolute secrecy and which, as you must perceive, concerns politics exclusively, a very large sum of money. He cannot collect the amount in India without attracting the attention of his subjects, and which, as you must perceive, is not the object of my visit, and I will go to the point."

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By Robert Minor

NEXT WEEK'S COMPLETE NOVEL IN THE EVENING WORLD

Little Comrade

By Burton E. Stevenson

Handing him a paper, he added: "Meanwhile, will you read this outline of the contract?"

The other took the document and read it slowly, seeming to weigh each word.

"That is excellent. I will ask only that you will have three copies, one for yourself, one which I shall send to the Maharajah, and one to keep among my accounts."

While the baron was writing this request in his notebook, for his secretary, the detective added: "The jewels will be at your disposal; do you intend to take them at once?"

"Wasn't that agreed?" asked the baron quickly.

"As soon as your signature are exchanged, you can dispose of them as you choose. I spoke of it in case you might wish to have them taken by some confidential man."

"No. I'll bring a small valise with me, and shall trust the matter to no one."

"And you are not afraid that . . . That is my usual method. Why should I attract attention by unusual precautions? There are always robbers on the watch, and I must think of some, come, Baron Plucke has just done a good piece of business, let's hold him up!"

That would be laying my first open weakness to their attack! No, with my valise, I'll just slip into the first cab that comes along, as if I were merely attending to some ordinary matter."

"Won't you at least allow me to send my valet with you? He'll ride on the box."

"No indeed. On leaving your home, I shall go directly to the Bank of France, and the jewels will be immediately deposited in my safe, without letting any one suspect that Baron Plucke has crossed all Paris with fifty millions on his chest."

"After all, you are right," replied the Count.

"Oh, I assure you that having such a fortune in my house has often kept me from sleeping! What wouldn't I give if people had not known it! But to try to hide anything from that Argus of a hundred eyes whose name is in the papers, writing them that the walls themselves had eyes."

While speaking, he had risen: "Day after to-morrow, then, sir? Lowering his voice, he added: 'This was the way, I thought, for my commission. I would willingly accept a check made out to bearer, if that would suit your convenience, but . . .'"

"No," answered the baron, patting him familiarly on the shoulder, "what is agreed is agreed."

He accompanied him to the door, passing through the drawing-room, where he saw the Countess waiting to be admitted, lounged in the foyer as the two came out.

Absorbed in their conversation, they crossed the immense hall without noticing the young man in his corner, who had glanced mechanically toward them.

Suddenly he started, seemed to fix his whole attention on them, and gazed with a keen expression until they had disappeared.

Then, passing his hand across his forehead with a feverish gesture, he murmured:

"It is impossible!" Just at that moment the baron came toward him, exclaiming cordially:

"Ah, Monsieur Delorme, I am glad to see you!"

Then, while ushering him into the parlor, he asked:

"Well, have you found anything interesting?"

"Perhaps so," replied the young man slowly.

"Don't ask me anything yet. Allow me to-day to put a few questions. And as the other assented, he said: 'Well, the man from whom you just parted?'"

The baron looked at him with a little astonishment.

"Comte d'Abazolia-Viscosa," he replied.

"One of your friends?" "No, the representative of a Hindoo prince, with whom I am doing some business."

In a few rapid words he informed Delorme of the transaction he intended to carry out, and the meeting which he had appointed for the next day, but one, with the Countess.

"Do you know anything discreditable to him?" he added.

"This is the first time I ever heard of him. Only there is an old proverb that says all roads lead to Rome, yet we must not, on that account, neglect anything that can put us on the right track. But, sir, in a few days I shall certainly have some news for you. That is what I came to tell you this morning."

While going down the staircase, he hesitated for a low tone:

"Oh, chance—chance, yes, the ancients had good reason to invoke it. Who would have said that, while going to the baron to inform him that I would give up trying to discover the murderers of Mrs. Tankery, I should leave him with hope?"

CHAPTER IV.
THE "A" BAND.

COMTE D'ABAZOLIA-VISCOA was in Paris in saying that in Paris everything was known. In fact, no one was ignorant that he was the guardian of a part of the treasures of the Maharajah of Pandhukurrah, or that the jewels were locked away in the big safe in his home. At his receptions, many people gazed longingly at his safe.

More than a robber, on the watch for some profitable job, had thought of getting possession of the jewels; but hitherto, the most skillful, as well as the boldest, had failed: the safe had remained inviolable, and the Hindoo servant placed by the Prince at the service of his representative who, every evening slept in the room where it stood, had discovered the criminals even before they had had time to reach him.

By the time the baron had decided to go on with the affair, and had even drawn up a contract, he told the Count of his decision and ended by saying:

"Day after to-morrow at 8 o'clock I will go to your residence." Then was a sort of Colossus, capable of

CHAPTER V.

A Well-Contrived Crime.

AFTER leaving Baron Plucke's, the Countess went directly home.

"Has any one called on me, Nam?"

"No, M. Comte, no one," replied the Hindoo servant.

He was a little brown-haired man of uncertain age, who wore the common costume usual among the servants of his country, a white waistcoat, a jacket, with a red and yellow sash, and a turban.

His keen little eyes and odd gesture made him resemble a fakir or a serpent charmer.

The Maharajah himself had sent this man to the former Comte d'Abazolia-Viscosa, and, on the latter's death, he had retained the Hindoo in his service.

"Is there anything I can do for M. Comte?"

"Not just now, Nam. I'll ring presently. Has Juliette returned?"

"She is at work in the linen room."

"Very well."

The Countess, crossing the passage, craned with all the trifles he had brought back from his journey to India, entered his office, a very plain room, as was appropriate, with the immense safe, its large door, and its imposing bookcases and its dark hangings.

He looked at himself in the glass a moment, slowly passing his hand through his jet black hair, uttered a sigh of satisfaction. He was evidently pleased with himself and had succeeded in accomplishing what he desired.

Then, going to the mantelpiece, he pressed the bell button, once twice.

(To Be Continued.)